

WE CLAIM:

1. A marine handling craft tetherable to a mother vessel, the marine handling craft being matable with a smaller marine payload for raising and
5 lowering the smaller marine payload to and from the mother vessel, the marine handling craft including a track extending above a compartment into which the marine payload can enter and exit and at least one attachment block traveling along the track and attachable to a tether extending from the mother vessel so that a smaller marine payload, when mated with the marine
10 handling craft, can be raised and lowered to and from the mother vessel.
2. The marine handling craft of claim 1 wherein the attachment block can be positioned above a combined center of gravity of the smaller marine payload on the marine handling craft.
3. The marine handling craft of claim 2 wherein the marine payload
15 comprises a smaller vessel and the position of the attachment block can be controlled from the smaller vessel or other networked locations.
4. The marine handling craft of claim 2 including a locking device for securing the smaller marine payload to the marine handling craft.
5. The marine handling craft of claim 1 wherein the track extends from the
20 bow of the marine handling craft aft above the compartment, and the attachment block travels from a position adjacent the bow for towing to a position above a combined center of gravity of the smaller marine payload and the marine handling craft.
6. The marine handling craft of claim 1 wherein the marine handling craft
25 includes variably-buoyant members flanking the compartment in which the smaller marine payload is received.
7. The marine handling craft of claim 1 wherein the marine handling craft includes an onboard computer programmed to maneuver the marine handling craft relative to the mother vessel.
- 30 8. The marine handling craft of claim 1 wherein the marine handling craft includes pontoons located on opposite sides of a compartment in which the smaller marine payload can be mounted on the marine handling craft, the buoyancy of the marine handling craft being adjustable for mating with the smaller marine payload.

9. A marine handling craft for use in transferring payloads including cargo, supplies, equipment and personnel to and from a ship, the marine handling craft being deployable from the ship fore, aft and to either side of the ship, the marine handling craft including a track to which a tether can be fastened at different positions fore and aft on the marine handling craft to tether the marine handling craft to a single crane on the ship, the marine handling craft being dockable to and undockable from an auxiliary vessel so that when docked, the marine handling craft and the auxiliary vessel can be raised to and lowered from the ship by the single crane.
10. The marine handling craft of claim 9 wherein attachment block means are traversable along the track, the attachment block means being attachable to the tether.
11. The marine handling craft of claim 9 wherein the track extends from the bow of the marine handling craft aft toward the stern of the marine handling craft, the track extending above a compartment into which the an auxiliary vessel is received for docking.
12. The marine handling craft of claim 9 wherein a tether is attachable at any location on the track corresponding to a position above a center of gravity of the marine handling craft docked to the auxiliary vessel.
13. A marine handling craft for use with a primary platform and with an auxiliary vessel, the marine handling craft being deployable at a distance from the primary platform, wherein:
- the marine handling craft is maneuverable relative to both the primary platform and to the auxiliary vessel and is mateable with the auxiliary vessel at a distance from the primary platform; and
 - the marine handling craft includes electronic data communication apparatus, the marine handling craft transmitting and receiving data to and from the primary platform and the auxiliary vessel to facilitate mating and docking of the auxiliary vessel with the marine handling craft and to coordinate movement of the marine handling craft relative to the primary platform so that the auxiliary vessel can be deployed and captured by the marine handling craft at a distance from the primary platform.
14. The marine handling craft of claim 13 wherein the marine handling craft is maneuverable relative to a mother ship comprising the primary platform.

15. The marine handling craft of claim 13 wherein the marine handling craft is maneuverable relative to an aircraft comprising the primary platform.
16. The marine handling craft of claim 13 wherein the marine handling craft is maneuverable relative to a helicopter comprising the primary platform.
- 5 17. The marine handling craft of claim 13 wherein the marine handling craft is maneuverable relative to a dock comprising the primary platform.
18. The marine handling craft of claim 13 wherein the marine handling craft is maneuverable relative to a subsurface vessel comprising the primary platform.
- 10 19. The marine handling craft of claim 14 wherein the marine handling craft includes an onboard computer, electronically communicable with the mother ship and with the auxiliary vessel.
20. The marine handling craft of claim 19 wherein the computer onboard the marine handling craft is programmed to control relative movement of the
- 15 marine handling craft, the auxiliary vessel and the mother ship.
21. The marine handling craft of claim 20 wherein sensors on the marine handling craft, communicable with the computer onboard the marine handling craft, monitor the relative positions of the marine handling craft, the auxiliary vessel and the mother ship.
- 20 22. The marine handling craft of claim 14 wherein the marine handling craft is powered for maneuverability independent of the mother ship and the auxiliary vessel.
23. The marine handling craft of claim 22 wherein the marine handling craft includes a detachable lock mateable with a complementary lock on the
- 25 auxiliary vessel for docking the auxiliary vessel to the marine handling vessel.
24. The marine handling craft of claim 14 wherein the buoyancy of the marine handling craft is adjustable so that the marine handling craft can mate with surface and subsurface auxiliary vessels or other payloads.
25. The marine handling craft of claim 14 including sensors on the marine
- 30 handling craft for verifying the condition of payloads on the auxiliary vessel when mated to the marine handling craft at a standoff distance from the mother ship to prevent hazardous payloads from being brought too close to the mother ship.

26. A marine handling craft for use with a primary platform to load an object located in a body of water onto the primary platform, the marine handling craft being deployable at a stand off distance from the primary platform, wherein:
- 5 the marine handling craft is maneuverable to capture the object at a stand off distance from the primary platform; and wherein
- the marine handling craft is recoverable by the primary platform only after verification by the marine handling craft at the stand off distance that the object can be safely moved into closer proximity to the primary platform.
- 10 27. The marine handling craft of claim 701 wherein the primary platform comprises a mother ship.
28. The marine handling craft of claim 27 wherein the marine handling craft is configured to capture an auxiliary vessel comprising a floating object at a distance from the mother ship.
- 15 29. The marine handling craft of claim 28 wherein the marine handling craft includes a keyed locking member attachable to a complementary keyed locking member on the auxiliary vessel so that only auxiliary vessels including the complementary keyed locking member can be brought into proximity to the mother ship by the marine handling craft.
- 20 30. The marine handling craft of claim 28 wherein the marine handling craft includes sensors responsive to potentially dangerous contents on the auxiliary vessel for detecting potential hazards to the mother ship.
31. The marine handling craft of claim 27 wherein the marine handling craft is tetherable to the mother ship at the stand off distance.
- 25 32. The marine handling craft of claim 27 wherein the marine handling craft autonomously verifies at the stand off distance that the object can be safely moved into closer proximity to the mother ship.
33. The marine handling craft of claim 27 including an attachment member tetherable to the mother ship, the attachment member being shiftable closer
- 30 to the combined center of gravity of the marine handling craft and the floating object, when the marine handling craft and the object are to be hoisted aboard the mother ship.
34. The marine handling craft of claim 27 wherein the marine handling craft is unmanned and is in electronic communication with the mother ship.

35. A marine handling craft for use in transferring payloads including cargo, supplies and personnel to and from a ship, the marine handling craft being deployable from the ship to mate with a supply vessel at a standoff distance from the ship, the marine handling craft being independently maneuverable
5 relative to the ship to mate with the supply vessel and being dockable with the supply vessel to make the supply vessel fast to the marine handling craft, the marine handling craft being tetherable to the ship and attachable to the ship so that the marine handling craft and the supply vessel can be coupled to and decoupled from the ship in unison to transfer cargo, supplies, and personnel
10 between the supply vessel and the ship.
36. The marine handling craft of claim 35 wherein the marine handling craft is attachable to a crane on the ship so that the marine handling craft and a supply vessel mated with the marine handling craft can be hoisted onto and lowered from the ship.
- 15 37. The marine handling craft of claim 36 wherein the marine handling craft includes a fastening member attachable to a tether and having a load bearing strength sufficient for lifting the marine handling craft and the supply vessel, when fully loaded, onto the ship so that the marine handling craft can be attached to a single crane on the ship, both for towing and lifting and
20 deployment of the supply vessel.